(41)

The humble PROPOSALS OF Sundry Learned and Pious DIVINES Within this Kingdom.

Concerning the

ENGAGEMENT,

Intended to be impoſed on them for their Subſcriptions.

Pſalm lxiv. 5. *They commune of laying ſnares privily.*

Exod. xxiii. 2. *Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

1 Pet. iii. 17. *For it is better if the will of God be ſo, that ye ſuffer for well doing then for evil doing.*

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The humble Propoſals of ſundry Divines within this Kingdom, Concerning the Engagement intended to be impoſed on them for their Subſcriptions.

§. I. WE Miniſters of the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*, who have all of us from the beginning faithfully ſerved the *Parliament*, and have in purſuance of thoſe great and honourable ends of juſt Liberty and Reformation, ſuffered many and grievous things in our Names and Eſtates from the common Enemy: and to this day have adhered *to our firſt Principles*, and do ſtill promiſe in our Places and Stations to *maintain the Peace of this Nation, and to pay obedience to the Laws thereof*; conceiving it our duty in ſuch a time as this, in all ways of meekneſs and humility to endeavour the Preſervation of our inward Peace and outward Safety, *being ſtreightned in Conſcience upon the Caſe of the preſent Engagement*, do humbly offer theſe enſuing particulars.

§. II. 1. That although we hold our ſelves bound by our former *Solemn Covenants and Engagements, in that ſenſe of them wherein they were by publick Authority impoſed on us*, yet being convinced of the neceſſity of civil Government in a Land, for the preſervation of Humane Society, and prevention of all thoſe Evils which the outrages of wicked men unreſtrained would produce, and upon mature deliberation conſidering, That when the wiſe and holy Providence of God (whoſe judgements are unſearchable, and ways paſt finding out) ſhall at any time ſo ſhake the foundations of States and Kingdoms, as to diſable one Government from affording protection and preſervation, and to admit any other to obtain it; it is not then ſtrange to the will of God, light of Nature, judgment of the learned, and practice of Chriſtians in former ages, nor to our own principles or former Engagements, to live quietly and peaceably in our places and callings, *and to ſubmit to ſuch things as are impoſed upon, or required of us, by the powers which are in actual poſſeſſion, being things in themſelves lawful and neceſſary to the preſervation of our ſelves and others*, (for this we conceive may be done without diſputing

ting the right or title of those that are in place of Magistracy) we do upon these premises declare *that we will accordingly* behave our selves.

§. III. 2. That we do humbly conceive that there is a *great difference between* these things and a Subscription to this Engagement, in the words wherein it is required, and that in divers respects.

First, *This Subscription (as to our Consciences)* doth imply, *an approbation of the present establishment, as effected by a full and a free Authority.*

Secondly, *An active concurrence, and as it were a ratifying consent of the people thereunto, it having been declared, that the original of all just power is in the People.*

Thirdly, An obligation, *to act at all times, in all places and capacities*; to the promoting and strengthning of it, and not only of it (but by a parity of Reason) of any other, which by the possible advantage of power, may at any time hereafter, even to the prejudice and ruine of this, *Set up it self, and then require of us the like subscription.*

§. IV. 3. Being by this Engagement bound up to these particulars, as the words seem to import, we further conceive, That we shall by this subscription, violate those former Engagements, in Oaths, Protestations, and in the Solemn League and Covenant, wherein we were by the former Commands of Parl. obliged, in which last particular, if the time we entred into it be considered, *viz.* In the day of our extremity, or the Religious solemnity, with hands lifted up to the most high God; or the matter of it, which is comprehensive of things Sacred and Civil, and particularly of the Rights and Priviledges of Parliament, and the Liberties of the Kingdom: or the sense wherein we then took it; or the asseveration, that we would never be drawn from it, by any Terror or Combination whatsoever; or the durable obligation which we brought upon our selves by it, even all the days of our lives; or the Considerations which we had before our eyes in the taking of it, namely, the Glory of God, the advancement of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Happiness of the King and his Posterity. These things being duly considered, do leave such an awful impression on our Consciences, that *unless the consistency thereof with this Engagement be made unquestionably clear unto us, it cannot but render our* Consciences trembling and doubtful, and so the act of Engaging, by the Apostles rule, to us unlawful, as by a parity of Reason it would have been undoubtedly

To the READER.

THIS Paper was Printed in the Year, 1650. and when thou haſt read it over, thou wilt find the Reaſons of Re-printing it now. It was then the Covenant *and* Engagement. *Now it is the Old, and New Oath of* Fealty *and Allegiance; and what was ſaid ſo well by way of Apology in that* Caſe, *may in a great meaſure paſs for ſuch in this. The* Presbyterians *at leaſt are bound by it to have favourable, and Charitable thoughts of thoſe who cannot take the New Oath; and I hope when they ſee what their Miniſters formerly ſaid in defence of themſelves for refuſing the Engagement, they will no longer impute the refuſal of the Oath in our Divines, to any thing but Conſcience, which naturally trembles at contrary, or ſuch as it thinks contrary Obligations, eſpecially upon Oath.*

As for thoſe of the Church of England, *who cenſure their ſuſpended Miniſters, this Book will be alſo uſeful for them. It will help them to judge favourably of them and their Caſe, and finally to believe that they chuſe Affliction purely to avoid Sin: I wonder they have not yet written an Apology for themſelves, it would do them much more Service, than This can do, however I hope it will do them ſome.*

doubtedly inconsistent with our Covenant, to have subscribed an Engagement to the King and Lords, without the Commons of *England*, if it should by their Agreement and Authority, have been required of us.

§. V. 4. These things being considered in the nature of the Engagement, and in the full relation to which it stands to former Engagements, cannot in our judgments but minister matter of *general scandal and offence to multitudes of men*, both good and bad, many of whom being not able to make, or happily so much as understand subtile distinctions, whereby guilt may either be evaded or palliated, will look upon us as breakers of our Oaths and Covenants, as prevaricators of the most sacred and solemn things, as men of ductile spirits, and prostituted Consciences, led by principles of fear or interest: which prejudice (though we would grant, were more founded in the ignorance and mistakes of these men, then many solid and just reasons) would yet grosly wound the Gospel, expose our Ministry to scorn (the honour whereof ought to be dearer to us then our lives) endanger the reputation, and so weaken the power of it in the Consciences of our hearers (who though through fear or other private ends may themselves have subscribed, yet retain low thoughts of us, as if we acted on the like principles) as that we cannot but believe, but *Christ* would be a greater looser by our subscription, then the state can any way be a gainer by it; we desire always to keep in mind the noble resolution of the Apostle, who would not in case of scandal *use his own just power, but chose rather to suffer all things, lest he should hinder the Gospel of Christ*, and concluded, it was better for him to die, then that any in that behalf should make *his glorying void.* Upon these and such like grounds, purely conscientious, and not out of any private interest or design, contrary to the peace of this Common-wealth, we are necessitated to forbear Subscriptions, until either *by solemn debate of the Engagement* (as of the Covenant) or otherwise, our Consciences shall be cleared of important scruples.

§. VI. So we humbly crave leave further to represent, that our former Governours (not duly considering that men even in highest authority as well as others, are by the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning scandal, bound to avoid the laying of snares and stumbling-blocks in the way of their Brethren) have not onely attempted (as in their late Canons) to impose an insnaring Oath, but also enforced Subscriptions on

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many godly and learned Miniſters, to the utter undoing of themſelves and Families, and that with ſuch rigor, that the beginning of K. *James* his Government, was with the deprivation of 3. or 400. of them: and though we ſhall not take upon us to charge upon that ſeverity of theirs the conſequences which have followed, yet we may offer this obſervation; that ſundry examples may be given of Governours, who have laid the unhappy foundation of enſuing evils to themſelves and their people in the beginning of their Government.

§. VII. And therefore we do preſume that thoſe in preſent power (according to their profeſſed Principles and Reſolutions, to have reſpect to tender Conſciences) will not enforce us to the ſad *Dilemma* of chuſing either ſin or affliction, and hope that the many years experience of our *quiet behaviour* and faithful ſervice, may give them a better aſſurance and ſecurity for our peaceable converſation, then the fained Subſcriptions of very many, who profeſs themſelves not engaged by this Engagement, but uſe it as a protection of their Eſtates, and a covert under which they hide and keep warm their former malignity, and who certainly would rejoyce at, and take the advantage of that ſad diviſion which is likely to enſue amongſt thoſe who have co operated in the common cauſe of Reformation and juſt Liberty.

§. VIII. We being at preſent ſhut up under ſuch conſiderations as theſe, do humbly beſeech thoſe in preſent power, not to compel us (whoſe reputation is as neceſſary for others, as a good conſcience for ourſelves) to draw reproach upon Religion, and vilifie the reputation of the Miniſtry, by which the ſervice of *Jeſus Chriſt* is advanced, and cauſe others to think we eſteem Oaths as changeable as opinions, and ſo brand us with the odious mark of equivocation and prevarication, ſubject us to the contempt and hate of all, as men of looſe and uncertain principles, lay foundations to our ſelves of ſubſcribing any thing hereafter upon the ſame grounds, and that unto theſe things we may not be enforced by ſo high and heavy a penalty as to be out-lawed of our Birth-right, which is a puniſhment too heavy to be inflicted for no crime, and as we conceive, can hardly be exampled to have been inflicted on any but perſons of infamous note, with whom (we may ſpeak without vanity) we have not deſerved to be numbred, until by wilful violation of the Laws, we deprive our ſelves of their protection, and forfeit the benefit of them.

FINIS.